



LEARNING THROUGH ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Possibilities and boundaries within a prison context

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ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON



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DEFINING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

“Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy” (Hoskins, 2006, p10)

→ Ethical boundaries: Do not contravene human rights and the rule of law



ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON: WHAT?

There's academic research that states prisoners' mental and physical health deteriorates during their time of imprisonment. That is commonly known and internationally studied. So self-worth and the idea of:

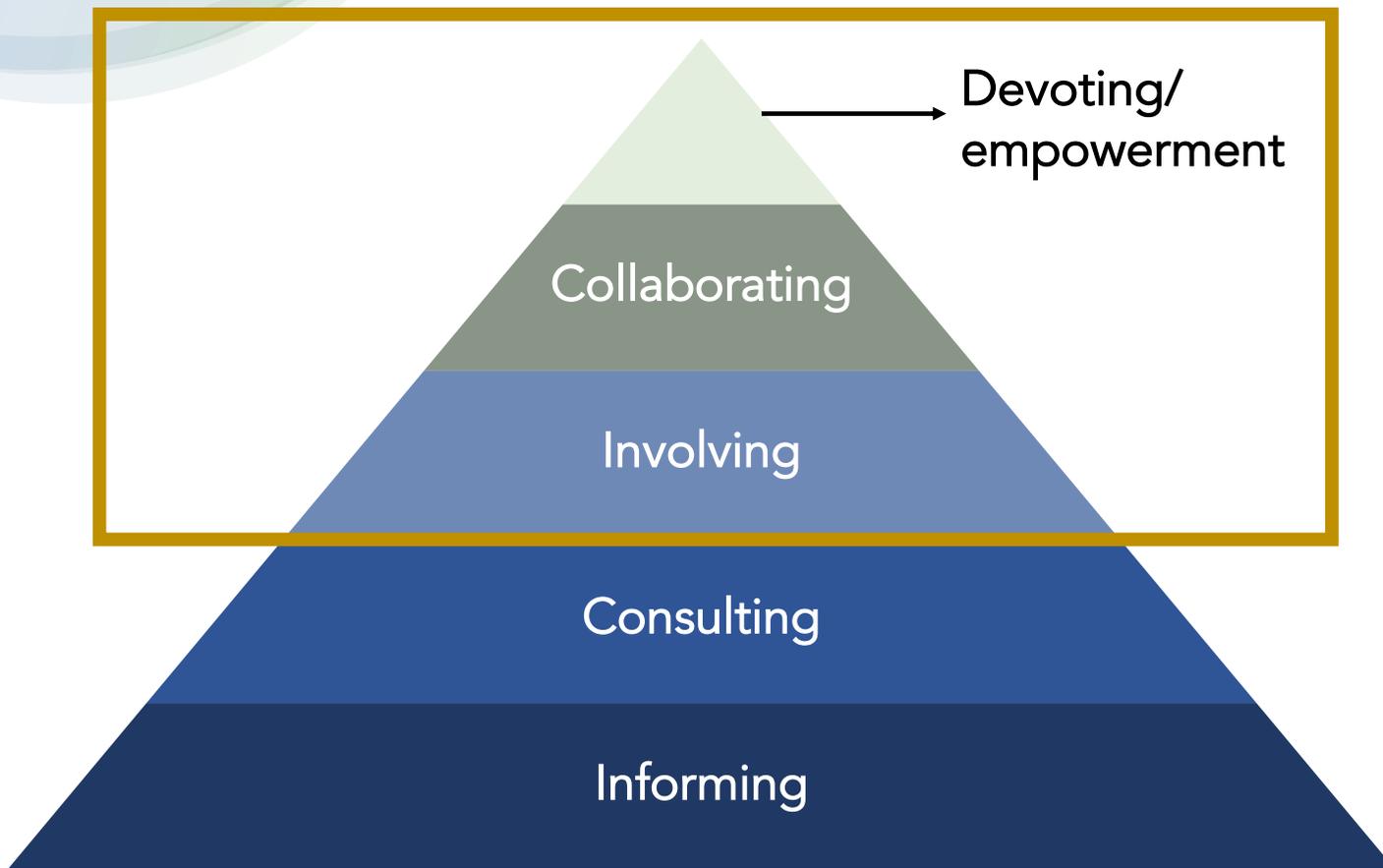
"I can be(come) someone, I can take responsibility, I won't succeed anyway but I can learn."

That's essential for participation.

If you participate, you take responsibility for what you say, what you do, etc. (Prison volunteer)

DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON

1) PARTICIATION PYRAMID



Incarcerated people as **active** contributors

Incarcerated people as **passive** recipients of services

DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON

2) THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION

Organizing and supporting
prison activities

Activities that bring members
of the community in prison, or
visa versa

Democratic participation

Peer-based interventions

DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON

2) THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION

Organizing and supporting
prison activities

- "Activity teams" responsible for organizing a quiz, sport activities, film evening,... for fellow prisoners
- Sport coaches

Democratic participation

- = Involving incarcerated people in decision-making about the prison regime
- E.g. prisoner councils, prisoner forums, inmate committees, representative councils, prison forums, student councils

DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON

2) THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION

Activities that bring members of the community in prison, or visa versa

- **Community members → prison**
 - Prison-university partnerships
 - Singing together in a choir

"The contact with people outside prison gives us the feeling that we belong and can be useful in society"
(Incarcerated person)

- **Prison members → community**
 - Helping at an event for disabled people

DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON

2) THEMATIC CLASSIFICATION

Peer-based intervention

- **Peer learning:**
 - Incarcerated people promote hygiene or the prevention of HIV, provide literacy training/ language training/ sports training to fellow prisoners
- **Peer support:**
 - Providing practical information to newly incarcerated people
 - Providing emotional support and preventing suicide

DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS OF ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON

3) FORMAL VERSUS INFORMAL

- **Formal** = organized and supported by professionals
- **Informal** = not organized and support by professionals

- Open regime

'When we get back from work, they [prison officers] should let us [prisoners] talk to one another for one hour with the doors open, so that we can go to others' cells, have coffee, watch a movie or play cards together' (incarcerated person)

- Closed regime

3 PRINCIPLES TO IMPLEMENT ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON



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1) CHOOSE FOR IT

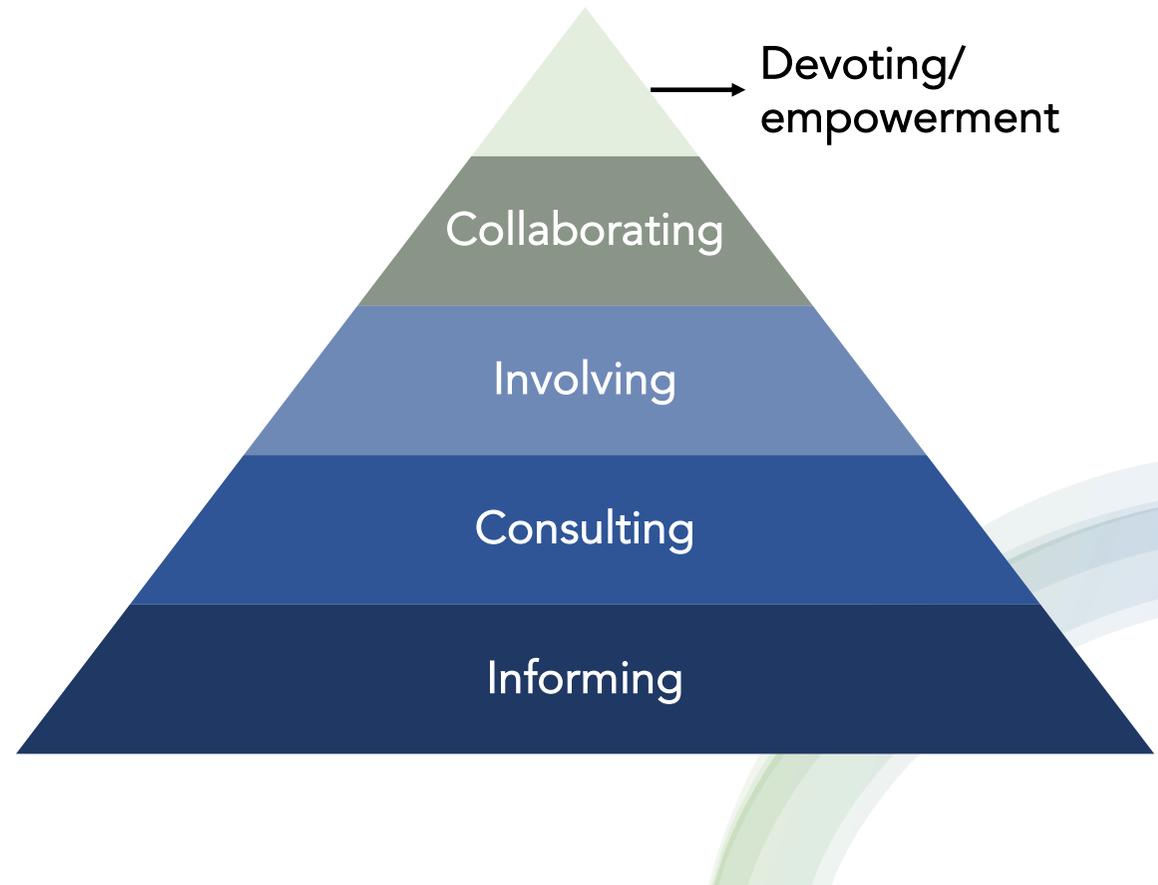
- Explicitly include this in policy
- Create of a **culture** in which active participation is not questionned any longer
 - Institutional buy-in

*"But when it comes to experiences, how to implement this sort of thing [active citizenship activity], it is **a very delicate process** because I had to **convince** them [prison staff] first of the idea of active citizenship. I had to convince the prison staff of the importance of this and that was quite something to be honest." (Professional)*

3 PRINCIPLES TO IMPLEMENT ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON

2) DECIDE WHICH LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION YOU WANT

- Depends on the goal
- All levels are valuable



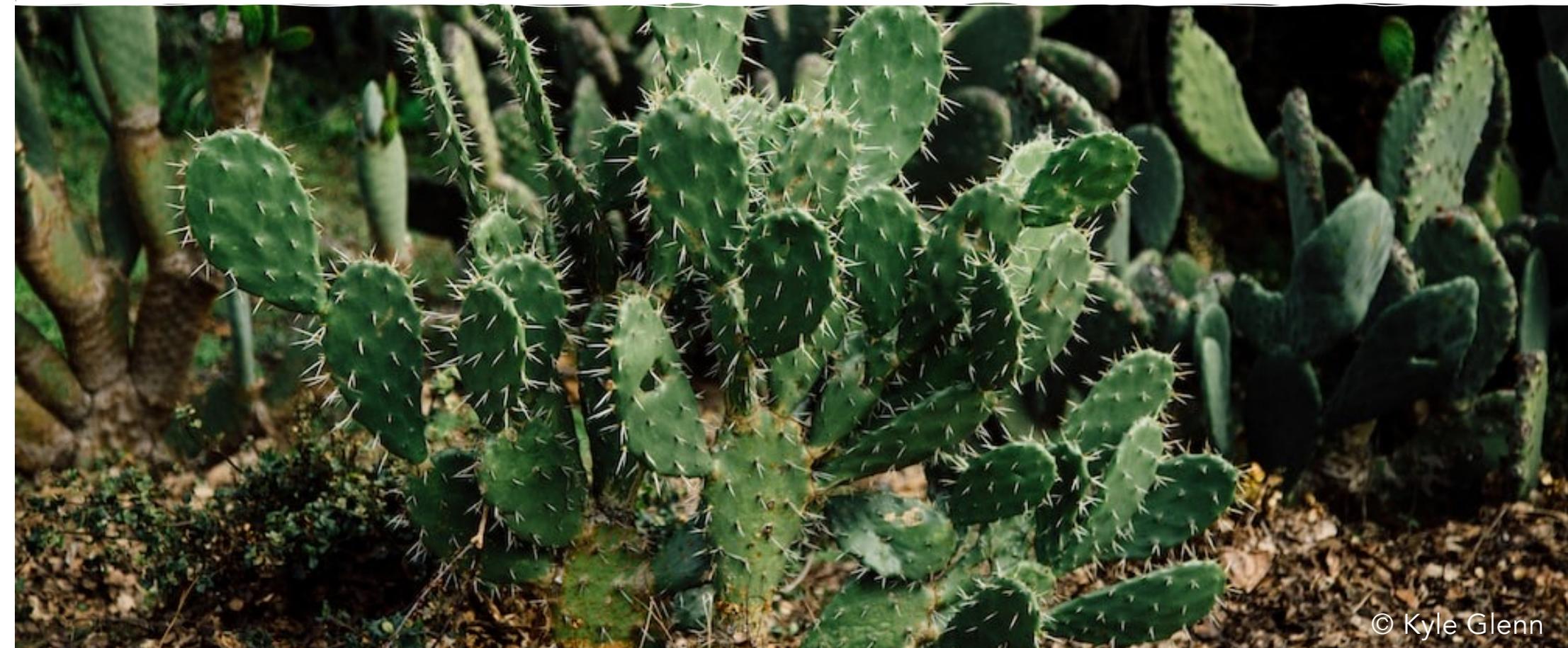


3 PRINCIPLES TO IMPLEMENT ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON

3) PROVIDE TRAINING AND SUPPORT

- **Training**
 - Content
 - Competence building
 - E.g. Training in assertiveness/ resilience for members of an activity team, communication, start to coach
 - **Support**
 - Individual & in group
- 

CHALLENGES TO "EXPERIMENT" OR "IMPLEMENT" ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN PRISON



CHALLENGES

- **What wins:** Active citizenship/ involvement/ participation or security?
- **Trust function**

We also have examples of people we needed to trust to do certain things, but afterwards it seemed that they did things to damage the organization. ... I'll give an example. There was a prisoner who was actively involved in our team to coordinate the activities, and he also got a lot of freedom. Afterwards it turned out that his business didn't look legitimate, that he had abused our trust. (Professional)

- **Hard-to-reach-groups**
- **Resources**



ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IS THE GLUE THAT KEEPS SOCIETY TOGETHER

(European Economic and Social Committee, 2012)



WANT TO READ MORE?

- Brosens, D. (2019). Participation and involvement in prison life: Examining the possibilities and boundaries. *European Journal of Criminology*, 16(4), 466-485. https://researchportal.vub.be/files/75769115/Brosens_Prisoners_participation_and_involvement_Authors_version.pdf
- Brosens , D. & Croux, F. (2019). *Prisoners' active citizenship : Evaluation of the PAC-learning areas*. Brussel : Vrije Universiteit Brussel. PAC-project. <https://pald.paddlecms.net/sites/default/files/2022-10/4.%20Brosens-and-Croux-2019-Evaluation-learning-areas-PAC.pdf>
- Brosens, D., Croux, F., & De Donder, L. (2018). *Prisoners' Active citizenship: An insight in European prisons*. Brussel: Vrije Universiteit Brussel. PAC-project. <https://pald.paddlecms.net/sites/default/files/2022-10/3.%20Brosens-et-al.-2018-PAC-An-insight-in-European-prisons-DEF.pdf>

DANKE!
THANK YOU!
MERC I!
GRAZIE!
GRACIAS!
DANK JE WEL!

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